

Gestures, A Useful Communication Technique

Gestures are a three-dimensional language that can be effective when words fail to get the point across. While verbal language deteriorates, the nonverbal messages found in gestures, facial expression, voice tone, and body posture are very powerful methods of communication.

Before using gestures, be aware of any cultural differences in the meaning of these gestures. Persons with Alzheimer's disease (AD) will best understand gestures that were familiar to them prior to their dementia diagnosis. When using gestures, make sure to face the person; alert him or her to your presence; and use slow, exaggerated movements.

Encourage persons with AD to use gestures when they are unable to say what they want to say. Through modeling the use of gestures, they will get the idea.

Useful common gestures:

- Mimicking and exaggerating movements to indicate functional activities, such as washing hands and face, eating, brushing teeth, combing hair, using the telephone, taking a drink from a glass
- Waving hello or good-bye
- Beckoning (outstretching a hand and bringing it back to yourself)
- Indicating a chair of place at the table with an outstretched hand, or sitting down in the chair first to show what you want the person to do
- Pointing or indicating with the whole hand toward yourself or others as you identify yourself or others by name
- Sliding your arm gently under the person's elbow, to indicate that you want the person to come with you

*Source: Debra Marks Carlson, MSN, RN, CS and Betty G. Foster, PHD, Reaching Communities with Alzheimer's Education, Advanced Train-the-Trainer Manual. Reprinted with permission from Eymann Publications, Inc., specializing in newsletters related to geriatric caregiving and issues of aging. **Alzheimer's Care Guide** is available for \$35 for a one-year subscription, 12 issues. Call or write Eymann Publications, Inc., P.O. Box 3577, Reno, NV 89505, 1-800-354-3371.*